The
COMMONWEAL

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Invective Is Not Dead

THIS SPRING has produced two specimens of invective which we have not the heart to pass over in silence. Readers with a taste for this sort of thing will doubtless wish to savor the originals in all their fulness. The first appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* for April 15, and constitutes a four-page leading article by Mr. Sinclair Lewis directed against Mr. Bernard DeVoto and his recent book, "The Literary Fallacy." Mr. Lewis does not like Mr. DeVoto. In fact, Mr. Lewis is very mad indeed at Mr. DeVoto, and does not hesitate for a moment to apply to him the terms "fool" and "liar." Perhaps Lewis's sharpest thrust is the following:

> My first encounter with DeVoto was on a train to Philadelphia, years ago. He timidly introduced himself as a teacher who was trying to write for *The Saturday Evening Post.* I had never heard of him but I was interested in that frog-like face, those bright eyes, that boyish and febrile longing to be noticed. I was reasonably polite to him, and he was grateful. I saw him several times afterward, but his screaming, his bumptiousness, his conviction that he was a combination of Walter Winchell and Erasmus, grew hard to take, and it is a long time now since I have seen him.

But Mr. Lewis is polite, and writes with kid gloves, compared to Senator McKellar. This worthy gentleman (*Congressional Record,* April 25) does not like Drew Pearson. He precipitated five pages of debate under the heading, "Personal Statement about a Lying Human Skunk." In Senator McKellar's own remarks, which cover about three and a half pages of the *Record,* the word *liar* and its cognates are repeated some 65 times, which does not add to the readability of the Senator's objections, but gives a pretty good indication of their heat. Here is a specimen of this momentous piece of Senatorial business:

> When a man is a natural-born liar, a liar during his manhood and all the time, a congenital liar, a liar by profession, a liar for a living, a liar in the attempt to amuse, or to be as he thinks smart, a liar in the daytime, and a liar in the nighttime, it is remarkable how he can lie.

We wish it thoroughly understood that none of the above is to be taken as constituting an endorsement of either Mr. Lewis, Mr. DeVoto, Walter Winchell, Erasmus, Senator McKellar or Mr. Pearson.

Bricker-Edge-LaGuardia-Ickes

THE QUESTION of what is to happen to Japanese Americans and to Japanese loyal to this country has been handled by a number of big shots during the last few weeks. We recently gave an account of Governor Edge's view of the matter. Governor Bricker, who says that the New Deal does not know how to deal with the Japanese, we had not thought worthy of notice. Then New York's fiery Little Flower joined the fray, claiming that the relocation of Japanese of any sort in his metropolitan area endangered national security—a subject about which the Mayor seems to feel he knows more than the Army, the Navy and the FBI. All this has proved too much for Secretary Ickes's temper. He has emerged from a relatively quiescent state, recently satirized in a cartoon showing a middle-class lady very much perturbed and evidently suspecting some terrible plot because Mr. Ickes had not exploded for several weeks. He makes it clear that he had expected nothing better from Governors Edge and Bricker. He knew their measure, but when it came to Mr. LaGuardia, the tone is different—*Et tu, Brute!*

> This is a strange fife and drum corps to be playing the discordant anthem of racial discrimination. Stranger by far than fiction. The Mayor of New York City, who has fought long and vigorously for racial equality and justice, carrying the flag, must be shocked and disturbed to find the drummer boy from New Jersey on his left and the fifer from Ohio flanking him on the right. I cannot but believe that he has joined this company through accident and misunderstanding rather than by deliberate choice.
>
> Mayor La Guardia has protested against the relocation of persons of Japanese ancestry in New York City, apparently on the theory that these people are dangerous and subversive. Actually there has not been one proved case

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of sabotage on the part of a Japanese American since the war began, not even in Hawaii.

The people who are being relocated from War Relocation Authority centers have been painstakingly checked and found, on the basis of their records, to be loyal American citizens or law-abiding aliens. Approximately 800 of these people are now living in New York City. To the best of my knowledge, they have not caused the slightest trouble and I am sure they have no intention of doing so.

Thus I can see no basis for the Mayor's fears or for his protests. I can only say that neither Governor Bricker nor Governor Edge is the type of bedfellow that he ordinarily chooses, nor the type of thinking that most of us expect from Mayor La Guardia. . . .

The Civil War Continues

IN TIMES like these it has seemed to us advisable to avoid rekindling the passions of burned-out controversies, even where we know some sound convincing remains to be accomplished. Accordingly in discussing Spain we have sought—notably in the series of articles by Professor Mendizábal—to discuss the present and recent past in order to lead up to a viable solution of the Spanish problem. An article proposing just such a solution is scheduled for publication in THE COMMONWEAL a few weeks hence. We are not anxious to go back again over the fevered arguments which raged in this country during the tragic Spanish Civil War.

But when a periodical with a circulation as large as *Our Sunday Visitor* (over 500,000 copies weekly) brings out in its Fort Wayne Edition a thunderous salvo for General Franco we cannot allow it to pass unchallenged. The puzzle is why at this date, now that many historical facts about the struggle have been clearly established, so many of the exploded Franquist claims should be resuscitated. It is puzzling that this sort of thing should take up more than half the text of the "Religious" Section in the April 23, 1944, *OSV*.

An attempt at this point unqualifiedly to back the Franco cause is disquieting enough. It is even more disheartening to examine some of the arguments advanced by *Our Sunday Visitor*. No one in possession of the facts, for instance, could possibly allege, as is done here, that "Franco's government, on the other hand, had no Office of Propaganda, and has had none since." Unless, that is, you do not count a bureau of information, which issues material with which you automatically agree, as a propaganda office.

Or to take another instance: "Soviet Russia was the first intervening government." The fact is that Italy and Germany sent in their planes at the very outset. Only later on did Soviet personnel and Soviet matériel play a preponderant rôle on the Loyalist side. What is to be gained from trying to ignore the facts?

Much of *Our Sunday Visitor's* latter day ammunition purports to come from the new edition of Madariaga's "Spain," which as a matter of fact is as conscious as THE COMMONWEAL has been of the terrible failings on both sides of the barricades. Several of *OSV's* conclusions taken from Madariaga are distorted and unwarranted. We object.

More from the Same Source

"CHRIST made His Church an 'International Business Machine, [with perforated cards] for saving souls. The Holy Spirit supplies the invisible power for each exact operation . . . It is fed with souls. If they do not measure up to the Divine Inventor's requirements, because of any deliberate deviation from His Doctrine, *they eject themselves.*'" (A. L. Hopkins, *Our Sunday Visitor,* April 23.)

Religious Book Week

EXACTLY eleven years after the infamous burning of the books in Berlin, the National Conference of Christians and Jews is sponsoring its second annual book week (May 7 to 14). To facilitate this observance the conference has chosen 200 religious books for laymen and listed them in a handy descriptive pamphlet available at 381 Fourth Avenue, New York, 16, N. Y. Most of the volumes included have appeared within the past ten years; there are a few older "classics." The "Good Will" section was selected by a committee on which Catholics, Protestants and Jews were represented. The lists of specifically Catholic, Protestant and Jewish books for young people and adults were chosen by committees representing each respective faith.

A Correction

THROUGH an unfortunate typographical error, Dr. Paul S. Stacey, author of "Oil, Gas and Money" in THE COMMONWEAL for April 28, was identified as "formerly a member of the Presidential Committee of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of *America* . . ." For *America,* read *Austria.*

The Grafton Plan

U. S. CONSULS, unlike correspondents, are not supposed—they are not even permitted—to write books every time they come home on leave of absence. So we have not yet had the excellent reading that would be in a book entitled "No Visas Today," or "The Consul Goes Home at Five." We have had books written by refugees who have looked at Consuls and at Vice-Consuls, but we have not had the books written by the Consuls and Vice-Consuls who have looked at the refugees. I am willing to give the

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Consuls and Vice-Consuls the benefit of every doubt, and their books, when they get written some day in calm and pensioned retirement, may be filled—some of them—with retrospective pity. The authors will say we carried out the law; we made sure that every line of the questionnaire was properly filled, we counted the photographs, we demanded the birth certificates; and then if everything was all right we affixed the Consular Seal and then, although there was always the line of applicants stinking up the office, there would be at least the applicant with only eleven photographs instead of twelve, the applicant who could not answer Question 73c., who would not be in line any more, and he might be back in the concentration camp from which he came, or he might be on his way back to Germany, to Poland, or he might be dead, or he might be only in a hotel garret with his face to the wall waiting to die.

The books written by the refugees are less bitter than they might be about this visa system and about the Consuls and Vice-Consuls who administer it, because, after all, the only refugees who write the books have beaten the system, beaten the races, and have reached a country where they can write books and get paid for them. The refugees who never got through the line which the Consuls held are not writing any books. The dead are not writing any books. The Consuls and the Vice-Consuls, after due promotion to the rank of Consul-General, Counsellor and Minister, will write their books ten, twenty, thirty years from now, when what they write will not matter. It will not matter whether they say, then, that they were sorry about the system while they were administering it, or whether there may be among them one who admits that he thought the system was just what our country needed for its protection and wanted, and/or, anyway, that when you have to refuse day after day something that people so desperately need you have to get tough about it or life would become impossible. But it does not matter what they will write or even what they feel now about it, at the time; undoubtedly some Consuls help the refugees all they can while others are what is called uncooperative. The fact is that they have to follow regulations and you can only twist regulations just so far one way or the other.

They have to follow the regulations covering entrance to this country. These regulations make it absolutely impossible to handle with any justice or liberality or charity the unprecedented situation which arose in Europe as a result of the German policy toward Jews, toward the peoples of conquered nations, toward those of their own folk who oppose the National Socialist régime. In America, emergency committees were formed to secure emergency visas, and the committees did fine work in order to secure a few exceptions to the normal regulations. But the framework in which everything has to be done is made up of regulations deliberately framed to restrict, make difficult, and slow down immigration to this country.

There was a conference in Evian and one in Havana but nothing came of these conferences. The war has driven unforeseen and great numbers of homeless men and women, persecuted, famished, with and without identity papers, passports or money, to the American Consulates in the cities and ports of Europe, and these people ask to be granted permission to take refuge in America. Between a great number of them and safety the regulations stand as a wall.

The regulations, and the fact that the American people have refused to instruct their representatives to change them.

Unceasingly from 1940 on, THE COMMONWEAL did what it could, pleading for justice. Because these refugees had a right in justice to live and the American people were refusing them that right. The Germans were refusing that right and we were refusing that right. Nothing happened—except that most people got tired of the subject.

Suppose then we have to give up this talk about justice. It did not get us anywhere. Suppose we put our influence, whatever determination to help the refugees we have left, back of the plan Samuel Grafton of the New York *Post* now proposes. His plan is beginning to be noticed; it has some chance of being put into effect; here it is, in his words:

> A "free port" is a small bit of land, a kind of reservation, into which foreign goods may be brought without paying customs duties. . . . A free port is a place where you can put things down for a while, without having to make a final decision about them. . . .
>
> Why couldn't we have a system of free ports for refugees fleeing the Hitler terror?
>
> Obviously we need a place where we can put refugees down, without making final decisions about them, a place where [like goods] they can be stored and processed, so to speak, without creating legal and political problems. Of course it shouldn't be against the law, exactly, to bind up a wound in such a free port, or to give somebody a drink of water.
>
> The need is for reservations of a few acres here and there, where a man who has been running for ten years can sit down and catch his breath, and where somebody can tell a story to a frightened child; a few reservations where it would be possible for those who cannot satisfy the requirements of law to rest a bit, without violating the law. . . .
>
> Of course, I am a little ashamed to find myself pandering to anti-refugee prejudices even to the extent of saying yes, pile the legal disabilities on them, give them no rights, store them like corn, herd them like cattle—but the need is so sharp, the time is so short, our current example to the world is so bad, that it is necessary to settle for whatever can be done.

Samuel Grafton calls his plan "repulsive." We could not get anyone to try the nobler ones.

C. G. PAULDING.

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The Reader's Digest

A study in cultural elephantiasis

James Rorty

The Reader's Digest *is today the most powerful vehicle for the printed word in the American hemisphere, being the largest-selling magazine both in North and South America. We feel that it does not play fair with the public in that it is not truly a digest, but originates a great deal of its material in its own offices. We also feel that it does not play fair with the public in the United States and Canada since it conveys to that public the impression that it carries no advertising and is therefore not beholden to outside commercial interests, whereas an important part of its revenue from foreign language editions is derived precisely from advertisers, and principally from American advertisers. We further believe that its sense of responsibility has not kept pace with its growth into one of the major factors in American culture. We therefore have asked Mr. Rorty to give a full, objective and careful account of this new factor in our national life. He approaches the question without sectarian or political bias.*
—THE EDITORS.

TWENTY-THREE years ago a young Middle-Western couple, neither of whom had had previous journalistic experience, conceived the idea that the American reading public would gladly pay a quarter for a monthly magazine consisting of cut-down reprints culled from the too-lush stream of American periodical journalism.

Although they launched their venture from 1 Minetta Lane, in New York's Greenwich Village, Mr. and Mrs. Dewitt Wallace were neither bohemians nor highbrows. Like Bruce Barton, whose go-getting version of the Savior was soon to win wide acclaim, Mr. Wallace was the son of a Protestant minister and college president. Before World War 1, in which he served with distinction and suffered wounds, Mr. Wallace had been a calendar salesman. Mrs. Wallace, herself also the daughter of a minister, had been before her marriage a traveling secretary for the Presbyterian Church. Both were able and ambitious people, at once conventional and idealistic, liberal in spots and conservative in others; but above all they were efficient, practical Americans, respectful of worldly success and determined to win some of it for themselves.

In selecting the contents of the early issues of the *Reader's Digest* the Wallaces drew unconsciously a portrait of themselves, their values, their interests and their limitations. As it happened, it was also a composite portrait of the average middle class American. Hence the miracle of the *Digest's* rise to affluence and power.

Volume 1 Number 1 of the *Digest* sold 5,000 copies. Twenty-three years later, Volume 44 Number 264 sold over 9,000,000 copies of the American edition alone. In addition, six foreign editions exhibited the Wallaces' portrait of *homo Americanus* to the wondering and by no means uncritical eyes of our global good neighbors in Latin America, Britain, Sweden, Arabia and China.

The Wallaces' portrait has been blown up to fantastic proportions. No other magazine or newspaper in the world today is read by so many people. In a little over two decades the *Digest* has become the most powerful instrument of social communication ever to develop under the direction of a single hand—for Mr. Wallace still owns the *Digest* as completely as he owns his watch.

Here, briefly summarized, are the facts of the *Digest's* phenomenal growth and present spread.

According to figures given in the May, 1944, issue of *Selecciones del Reader's Digest* (the Spanish edition) the gross circulation in English of the *Digest* is 9,345,000. (According to the business office of the *Digest,* 7,000,000 copies are sold through trade channels in the United States and Canada.)

In estimating the "readership" of their magazines most publishers like to apply a multiple of 3 or 4 to their circulation. The *Digest* can afford to be modest. It estimates its total readership at only 25,000,000. This is obviously very conservative. An estimate of double that number would probably be closer, since repeated surveys have shown that each issue is read both by more people and with greater thoroughness than is the case with most magazines.

Several hundred thousand copies are used every month by high school and college teachers for whom the *Digest* publishes a special "Teacher's Guide." In addition, it publishes a "program outline" for use by discussion groups and cooperates with the reading clinic of New York University

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by publishing a special edition containing an insert prepared by the directors of the clinic and designed to improve the reading techniques of the *Digest's* clientele.

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These supplementary service and circulation-building features—which, incidentally, are conducted with notable competence—plus the evidence of recent surveys showing a very high "readership" of the magazine confirm the belief that the *Digest* is uniquely powerful among American periodicals. Its spread includes all regions, all economic classes, all sects, all ages, from high school up, with the proportion of *Digest* readers highest in the higher income and education brackets.

But that is not all. Possibly it is only a beginning. In addition to its American edition the *Digest,* beginning in 1939, has launched seven ventures into the foreign field, with every indication that there are more to come.

A Spanish-American edition was started in 1940. It now sells 800,000—by far the largest magazine circulation in the language.

A Portuguese-American edition was started in 1942. It now sells 310,000 copies—again the largest circulation in the language.

A British edition, started in 1939, now has a circulation of 225,000—larger than that of any other shilling magazine.

A Swedish edition, started in 1943, now has a circulation of 250,000.

An Arabic edition, started in 1943, has a circulation of 125,000, and is without competition in all the countries where Arabic is the written language, from Aden to Casablanca.

A Chinese edition was started in 1943, when the OWI suggested that the *Digest* management cooperate with and systematize the efforts of an enterprising Chinese who had begun to pirate the contents of the American edition.

The combined circulation of the foreign-language editions is about a million and a half, which added to the 9,345,000 copies printed in English gives a total of about 11,000,000.

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Great oaks from little acorns grow, but an oak is not an acorn. By the same token, the 1944 *Digest* is not only quite different from its 1921 progenitor, but also, one suspects, quite different from what its creator intended it to become. This is true despite the fact that the outlines of the original circulation-building formula are still discernible, even in the foreign editions. The latter (except for the British edition, which is more like the American) consists of selections from the parent magazine, much being discarded as too indigenous or otherwise unsuitable for foreign consumption.

The changes, however, by far outweigh the resemblances. They affect the contents of the magazine, the methods by which its material is procured and edited, and, most important of all, the relationship of an expanding *Digest* to a shrinking world of publishing and of politics. By listing and attempting to appraise these changes it will be possible to obtain some notion of the present rôle and possible future of the most gargantuan publishing enterprise in the history of the written word.

To begin with, the *Reader's Digest* was never a digest even in its first issues; not in the sense that *Time* and *Newsweek* are news digest magazines, or that a technical magazine like *Nutrition Reviews* is a monthly digest of the significant scientific papers appearing in its special field. Instead, the *Digest* was simply a commercial periodical publishing idea, of which scores are born and die every year. The Wallaces thought they knew the kind of stuff the American people could and would read, and events proved that they were right. It would of course have been impossible for them to "digest" the total stream of American periodical literature and they never pretended to do so. But neither did the *Digest* achieve, either in the early years or later, the objective which Alfred Dashiell, its present managing editor, stated to this writer: "To report and comment on the American way of life as it unfolds, being guided by the press and books."

This is an acceptable formula for a serious cultural enterprise, whereas the *Digest* was and is primarily a business. If the Wallaces had applied Mr. Dashiell's formula they might have produced something as instructive, creditable, and doubtless as obscure as the late lamented *Littell's Living Age,* which at its peak never attained a circulation of much more than twenty thousand. Instead, they produced a piece of popular literary merchandise which seemed a bargain to its subscribers and news stand buyers and doubtless was in some respects a better value for the money than the publications from which its material, in its first phase, was taken.

From the beginning the vitality of the *Digest* was not an expression of the "unfolding American way of life," which as a matter of fact was degenerating during the profitless prosperity of the twenties, being steadily undermined by public-utility, holding-company and other financial racketeers. Nor was it derived from the magazines, newspapers and books which in the beginning supplied its contents. Rather, the vitality of the *Digest* lay in the immense salability of its formula, and in its astute exploitation of certain strategic advantages, the most important of which were its simple and inexpensive format and the fact that it was unencumbered by advertising.

According to *Fortune,* which published an arti-

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cle about the *Digest* in its November, 1936 issue, the formula developed by the Wallaces was brilliantly simple. To merit publication in the *Digest* an article must pass three criteria:

Applicability: the reader should feel that the subject concerned himself.
Lasting interest: the article should be worth reading a year thence.
Constructivism: with preference to good works.

Presumably, application of this formula produced the typical monthly *Digest* table d'hôte of miscellaneous information, pluck-and-luck individualism and self-help, sweetened with pure entertainment, peppered with popular science, frosted with inspiration, and made "readable" at all costs, even if this entailed making an author look like a dehydrated Zombie, which was often the case.

A surprising fact about the *Digest* is that even after it had become big and rich, it did not "departmentalize" its coverage of science, health, politics, economics and so forth, nor employ recognized experts in these various fields. It prides itself on its careful checking of every article. But since its staff editors, well-paid and able though they may be, are ordinarily obliged to start from scratch and depend on outside consultants, the *Digest* is occasionally embarrassed by such howlers as Louis Bromfield's rash predictions of famine in February. Mr. Bromfield would scarcely have been permitted to make this mistake if the *Digest* had had a competent economist on its staff—Stuart Chase, for example. The lack of a competent science editor is equally surprising in view of the *Digest's* continuous coverage in that field. For example, if the *Digest* had been so equipped, it might well have induced Paul De Kruif to balance his rhapsodic description of the flour and bread enrichment program by mentioning the fact that a similar program in Britain was suspended under pressure of the British medical press, which brought about the adoption, instead, of the present National Wholemeal Loaf. In going through the *Digest's* files one gets the impression that each issue is a fresh improvisation on the standard theme of the *Digest* formula. There is no continuity such as might be provided by an editorial page or by monthly political or popular science columns. The moving finger writes in the *Digest*, and moves on. Its readers are given the illusion of participation in the cultural process of their time, but unless they balance the *Digest* with heartier fare, the illusion may be a dangerous one.

If the unfolding American way of life, as recorded in the press and books, happened to fit that formula, it got into the *Digest;* otherwise not. In any case the formula, being a profitable one, developed its own eager will to live and grow. It was in fact as greedy for nourishment as a rhubarb plant. So that in the early thirties, when mass unemployment reduced the idea of self-help to an absurdity; when the American way of life yielded little inspiration to the people who were trying to live it; and when even the popular magazines from which it customarily drew its material leaned toward the grim side, the *Digest* began to run short of material.

Accordingly it began ordering and purchasing original articles—more and more every year. To maintain the ostensible character of the *Digest* as a reprint magazine, these articles were offered for first publication to other magazines. The latter ordinarily accepted them, both because they got them for nothing and because their later republication in the *Digest* in condensed form, and with credit to the magazine in which they had first appeared, provided welcome publicity, especially for struggling liberal sheets with small circulation and little or no support from advertising. This method, in addition to supplementing the supply of written-to-formula articles, had, according to the *Digest's* editors, the advantage of providing a triple check by the writer and two sets of editors on the accuracy of the article. It also provided publication of the writer's work in its extended form.

During the same period Mr. Wallace further strengthened his position by negotiating contracts with other magazines, providing that in exchange for certain annual fees, the *Digest* would have exclusive right to reprint their material. The terms of these contracts vary, and one is told that this and other aspects of the *Digest's* relationship to its contemporaries are undergoing "development." Ordinarily the *Digest* makes no objection to the use, by other reprint magazines, of material which it doesn't want for itself.

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As the *Digest* entered its second decade it was making a good deal of money for its owner and Mr. Wallace spent it freely. His policy, in fact, whether he was dealing with other magazines, their contributors, or with his own expanding staff was one of extraordinary generosity. During the lean years of the depression, the potential "velvet" of a generous *Digest* reprint fee, usually split fifty-fifty between the writer and the magazine publisher, became a factor of importance to both.

With respect to the struggling journals of opinion, especially, this had two effects. Increasingly, articles written for these magazines were likely to be slanted for possible reprinting in the *Digest*. This did not necessarily harm the articles, but it certainly did them and their authors no good beyond helping to pay the rent, a consideration not to be neglected.

The second effect was that unconsciously the *Digest* became a sort of sacred cow in liberal editorial offices and among writers who might other-

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wise have concerned themselves with analyzing the really portentous cultural phenomenon which the *Digest* was fast becoming.

It would be easy to explain this neglect on entirely legitimate grounds. In the first place, if one were a crusading journalist—a trade which after World War I became more and more archaic and unprofitable—there were plenty of vested interests to shoot at that were manifestly bigger and badder than the *Digest*. In the second place, the *Digest* despite its bigness and its plushiness, was itself a working member of the liberal press with respect to an important aspect of its editorial program, namely its defense of that put-upon Throttlebottom, the American consumer.

Because the *Digest* didn't take advertising, it could afford to give Throttlebottom a break occasionally. Even a superficial survey of its files reveals dozens of articles, covering almost the entire waterfront of consumer interests, from bread and women's fashions to cigarettes and the undertaking business. Hence one is forced to believe either that a certain genuine evangelism in Mr. Wallace was having its inning, or that the *Digest's* routine checks of the relative popularity of its individual articles showed a high score for those dealing with consumer interests and with aspects of individual and collective health and welfare which other mass-circulation magazines found untouchable. These include such major acts of courageous public service as the publication of Surgeon General Thomas Parran's article on syphilis, reprinted from the *Survey Graphic,* where the chances of a kick-back in the form of canceled subscriptions were quite real. In general, however, it is not unfair to say that the *Digest* would scarcely have continued to push these pro-consumer articles, both original and reprints, unless it had found it good business to spice its formula with explosive material of this sort.

In "Our Master's Voice—Advertising,"* this writer has attempted to set forth the rationale of this business by advancing the concept of "tertiary parasitism." Monopoly business, as Veblen pointed out, parasites on the body of industry, which it conscientiously sabotages in the interest of maintaining or increasing profits from manipulated scarcity. In turn, advertising parasites often enough on the body of business. Finally, there appears the de-bunker of advertising, who exploits the accumulated public disgust with the disingenuous antics of advertisers. At the low point of the depression a magazine calling itself *Ballyhoo* built a huge but ephemeral circulation by spoofing the advertising business in words and pictures. It wound up by itself soliciting advertising, after which it quickly died. (Mark this well, Mr. Wallace.)

*John Day. $3.00.

This brings us to the *Digest's* third or imperial phase which has alarmed some of its friends and provided the best ammunition yet afforded to its enemies. With the exception of the British edition, all the foreign editions of the *Digest* are supported by advertising. This means, one suspects, that the modified *Digest* formula of information, entertainment and inspiration provided for these editions will not be leavened by intermittent crusades against the imbecilities of radio commercials, the menace of the cigarette habit, and the monopolistic iniquities of millers and bakers. It may mean more. Conceivably it may mean that in order to sell advertising space in its foreign editions the *Digest* may feel obliged to sheathe the sword of its American edition with respect to the imbecilities of advertising at home, and, in general, to liquidate its traditional interest in the welfare of Throttlebottom, the American consumer. When I suggested this possibility to the *Digest's* genial and able business manager, Mr. A. L. Cole, he repudiated it stoutly.

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One does not question Mr. Cole's sincerity, but a glance at the advertising pages of the *Digest's* foreign editions leads one to wonder how long it can continue to serve God and Throttlebottom at home, at the same time that it is serving as a shill for big business, including the pain and beauty boys, abroad. Not even the *Digest* is rich enough to finance its current cultural invasion of the globe without a working alliance with American big business. In order to obtain big circulation and smother the native competition, as it has done almost instantly, the Spanish and Portuguese editions exported to South America both have to sell for the approximate equivalent of a dime, of which the *Digest* gets a nickel. That doesn't pay the cost of production, hence the *Digest* sells space in its foreign editions at from 3 to 14 hundred dollars a page, depending upon varying guarantees of circulation. The May, 1944, edition of *Selectões do Reader's Digest,* the Portuguese edition, contains 120 pages of text and 48 pages of advertising, the Spanish edition being about the same. The Swedish edition for September, 1943, contains 124 pages of text and 28 pages of advertising. Of the 59 advertisers appearing in the Portuguese and Spanish editions, 34 appear in both. There is less duplication in the Swedish edition, in which are to be found a half-dozen Swedish advertisers in addition to a score of Americans.

No advertisements of less than a page are accepted and already the *Digest's* advertising clientele constitutes an enviable list of American corporations, including US Steel, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, a dozen of the most important aircraft and motor manufacturers (among them Ford), Johnson and Johnson

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(Pond's Cold Cream), Dana perfumes, Listerine, RCA, General Electric and Westinghouse, Eastman Kodak, US Rubber, Swift, Singer Sewing Machines, International Harvester, Parker and Sheaffer fountain pens, Bausch and Lomb, Kellogg's corn flakes, Schenley's whiskey and many other blue chip corporations and their products. Notable for their absence are General Motors and cigarettes of any brand.

If you can stand high altitudes, it is now time to ascend into the stratosphere above Pleasantville's gentle rural landscape and contemplate the shape of things to come in the publishing world when the *Digest* really gets going. Keep in mind the following facts: (1) that the momentum of the invincible Wallace editorial formula is seemingly not exhausted even in this country. (2) That the evidence to date indicates the same formula is as effective in Buenos Aires as it is in Chicago, in Cairo and Stockholm as in Oshkosh; (3) that the present circulation of nearly 2,000,000 foreign *Digests* was largely obtained in the space of three years in the middle of the war; (4) that all of these foreign editions are already paying their own way, or are shortly expected to do so; (5) that theoretically at least the potential circulation of these dime editions is limited only by the literate population of the inhabited globe; (6) that following the *Digest's* reconciliation with the advertising business, it may be expected that the expanding *Digest* habit will carry in its wake all the other addictions, gadgets, conspicuous wastes and bottled defense mechanisms which compose the American culture in its present uncritical surrender to the technological continuum.

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The more one contemplates this giddy enterprise, the more regrettable it seems that the liberal American press has delayed so long any adequate reporting and criticism of what the *Digest* was doing. It is perhaps significant that the attack when it developed at first came not from the liberal quarter but from those steadfast defenders of cultural and political totalitarianism, the communist press and its daily and periodical fellow travelers. From the point of view of the *Daily Worker,* which launched its attack in the fall of 1943, the *Digest* had well earned its hostility. It had done more in all probability to immunize the American mass mind against the infiltration of the communist brand of totalitarianism than any other single agency. It had published a condensed version of Jan Valtin's "Out of the Night," which Party scribes have tried assiduously, but unsuccessfully, to discredit. It has published articles by such informed critics of the Soviets and of the American communists as Eugene Lyons and Max Eastman, who is one of the *Digest's* roving editors.

Sender Garlin, author of the *Daily Worker* series, later assembled in a pamphlet with an introduction by Theodore Dreiser, recites all these sins and then has the effrontery to include as a further indictment the fact that the *Digest* in November, 1939, printed Charles Lindbergh's "Aviation, Geography and Race" and in November, 1944, published a condensation of Mrs. Lindbergh's book, "The Wave of the Future." The writer agrees that the *Digest* should not have published Mr. Lindbergh's piece, not at least without sharply disassociating itself from Lindbergh's half-baked and dangerous racism. But at the time it was published the Hitler-Stalin pact was still in effect, and the communist press had only praise for the Lindberghs; Party members and fellow travelers helped pack the mass meetings of the America First organization.

Certainly the *Digest's* owner opposed our entrance into the war before Pearl Harbor, as did this writer, along with millions of patriotic and liberal Americans. There can be no question also that the *Digest* during this period functioned through what it did and did not print as an important and effective member of the isolationist press. That did not make it unpatriotic or fascist then, nor does its continuing dislike and criticism of the Roosevelt Administration add up to a similar indictment now.

The *Daily Worker's* crusade was followed by a number of obviously derivative attacks on the *Digest* appearing in the *New Masses,* in *In Fact,* and in Mr. Len. Le Caux's *CIO News.* The communist-controlled Teachers' Union passed a resolution denouncing the *Digest.* Other party-dominated organs and organizations followed suit.

All this was patently interested and disingenuous and was properly discounted as such by liberal editors and readers. It was not until February 9, 1944, that Mr. Harold Ross, editor of the normally apolitical and sophisticated *New Yorker,* put his finger on what really makes the Digest something to worry about.

In announcing that the *New Yorker* would no longer permit material appearing in its pages to be reprinted by the *Digest,* Mr. Ross pointed out that much of the contents of the *Digest* consisted of original rather than reprinted articles.

"Of the stuff that *is* presented as reprint material," said Mr. Ross, "much actually originates in the office of the *Digest* and gets farmed out to some other magazine for first publication . . ."

A month later, the *New Republic* announced that it would no longer use material originating in the *Digest* office; the *CIO News* renewed its attack, and *PM* published a series of three articles by Kenneth Stewart. The latter concluded that in recent years the *Digest* has "left with the mass of its readers the feeling that our government is a

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bungling, boondoggling bureaucracy; that organized labor is run by racketeers; that our Allies cannot be counted on in the long run; that a radical conspiracy is undermining the American way of life; and that only private enterprise can save it."

To the writer, this seems less than fair. Moreover it appears with ill grace in *PM*, which has frequently failed to temper its partisanship with even the conventional modicum of journalistic scrupulousness.

It remains true, however, that the *Digest*, ostensibly a magazine of information and entertainment rather than a magazine of opinion, and without an editorial column on which to pin responsibility, has none the less conveyed to its readers its extremely low opinion of the Roosevelt Administration. It has done this both through what it printed and failed to reprint from the pages of its contemporaries, and through original articles prepared by its own editors. What's more, its methods on occasion have been highly objectionable. For example, although it was not only legitimate but highly desirable, in the writer's opinion, to report and criticize the Administration's implementation of our Good Neighbor policy in South America, it was not legitimate to plant its not wholly accurate article, this time not in another magazine, but in the mouth of United States Senator Butler.

At the same time, and with the active cooperation of Mr. Roosevelt's OWI, the *Digest* has entered the foreign field, not only to "report and comment on the American way of life" but to serve as advance agent for American big business, with which its own big business would seem by now to be inseparably allied. In effect, it is using its invincible formula as a steamroller to crush journalistic competition and to make smooth the path of the American way not only to our tongue-in-the-cheek South American neighbors, but to the Swedes, who would conceivably like to retain their own "middle way," with strong cooperatives to balance the acquisitiveness of business; to the Chinese whose cultural guardians—Lin Yu Tang, for example—regard the march of the American way with extreme distrust; even to the veiled houris of the Arabian oases, who as yet don't know what it is their best friends won't tell them, but will shortly learn.

To balance this cultural and commercial evangelism, and to make sure that it comes to nothing, the American edition of the *Digest* has meanwhile been serving as loud speaker for Eric Johnston and other "singers of economic mammy songs"—to use Stuart Chase's graphic phrase—about going back after the war to some mythical system of free enterprise which hasn't existed in this country for at least fifty years. It would seem obvious, one would think, that the minimum base for a post-war cultural and economic imperium abroad—assuming we are to have one—is an adequate and stable production and employment situation at home.

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What all this boils down to is that the *Digest*, starting as a harmless commercial publishing idea, has become a major force in American life and in American and world politics. If the *Digest* is prepared and equipped to use this power responsibly and intelligently, it is conceivable that it can successfully defend, during the economic and social confusion of the post-war years, whatever is humanly valid and viable in the so-called "American way of life," and whatever is sound and constructive in our foreign relations. If it is not so prepared, it will remain merely a part of the helpless, obscurantist drift of big and little business which seems likely to plunge us into economic collapse after the war and so into political totalitarianism.

In the intellectual fare of the American people —America today and tomorrow the world?—the highly processed and highly popular *Digest* has come to occupy a position similar to that of our highly processed and popular white bread in the American diet. Because modern white bread didn't contain enough vitamins and minerals to metabolize its calories it had to be fortified with these essential food accessory factors.

Similarly the *Digest* needs to animate and control its huge bulk and momentum with some grade A ideas.

As our millers and bakers tiresomely reiterate, white bread, even unenriched white bread, is a clean wholesome product. It doesn't give you beriberi, not if you balance it with an adequate consumption of fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately millions of poor people can't afford to do that, hence their unbalanced diet leaves them prey to a variety of deficiency diseases and lowers their resistance to infection.

Similarly, good Americans are not likely to break out in a rash of fascism after reading the *Digest*—which, incidentally, was one of the American magazines banished from the Reich in 1937.

But it remains true that the millions of people who depend largely on the *Digest* for general information are in danger of intellectual malnourishment and ideological deficiency diseases, with consequent lowered resistance to the political degeneracy and the social infections that become epidemic in a democracy when its press fails to discharge its responsibility.

If the *Digest* is merely a business, grown too big for its breeches, the American destiny is no more safe in its hands than it is in the hands of monopolistic big business as a whole. If it is a serious cultural enterprise, it should make haste to clarify and implement its seriousness.

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I am told that some of the *Digest* editors, watching with mystical awe the seemingly cosmic compulsion by which their creation has grown great, have murmured among themselves a little tremulously: "Does the *Digest* have to keep on getting bigger?"

Almost any irreverent outsider can answer that one. It doesn't have to get bigger. It would seem in fact to be a prisoner of its present hugeness. It is like our Land of the Free in that respect.

No, the *Digest* doesn't have to get bigger. It just has to get better, even if this should mean getting littler.

The Two-Edged Sword

The unheard music of God*

Jean C. de Menasce

A DISTINGUISHED anthropologist, analyzing African civilizations in which the clan has remained so strong, remarks that in such societies "any originality is a sin." Man is the ant in the anthill, the limb of a body, the cell. Christianity has not feared to turn this whole conception upside down. The worlds, the kingdoms and their power and their culture are for me. God does not love humanity, He loves me; He loves Jean and without Jean He finds that life is not worth living. My fulfillment is not to serve God but to enter into a society of persons with Him—"God has made of man His God," wrote Saint Augustine. I am not here for the family, the family is here for me; I am not made for the State, the State is made for me; I am not made for Industry, Industry exists for me. I am not made for labor, I am made to love and to know. What ravages this message, misinterpreted, has brought! The strange freaks that usurp the place of man, deified and destined to divine friendship—and so we have this biped thinking itself God, this arrogant and anti-social being, this slothful being which turns aside from all humble and collective tasks, no longer knowing how to share in mankind's immense burden.

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A badly understood Christianity, half lived, leads not only to temptations of turbulence, excess and arrogance. Along our path it prepares traps of sloth and torpor, it imperils man's vigor.

God's generosity disconcerts us when we are ardent, demoralizes us when we are lukewarm. The body of the adulterous woman, mangled and crushed beneath the heavy paving stones that they took from the streets and let fall upon her, gave the Jew not just a terror of sin but also a certain partial insight into the mystery of iniquity. In Christianity sin is punished in a still more fearful manner; it is not the body of the guilty which is tortured; it is the Innocent's body which is tortured. It is not I who suffer, it is He whom I love more than myself who, defenseless, takes the entire punishment, the entire disgrace, the full humiliation. Yet when Catholics go to Confession or when Protestants make some inner act of repentance, they forget that the total punishment by which forgiveness is sanctioned was borne by Christ. Man, no longer lashed in his flesh, and with so little love, cannot say and cannot succeed in feeling I throb in *Your* hands, I ache in *Your* shoulders. Little by little he ends by thinking that sin, after all, is not so serious. The Crucifixion should lead us to an agony beyond that even of being stoned; often it leaves us with incredibly less. To be punished in another should be a terrifying thing. To be placed in a position where we cannot even be smart and say I do what I want and I take the consequences should tear us away from sin.

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God has given many little gifts—yet with a certain parsimony—in order to create more love and more unity. He has not given directly to each one of us all His gifts, in order to teach us to possess them in our neighbor. Loving the Blessed Virgin as myself, I have in her her privileges; in the love of the Church I have all the gifts of God. But His greatest gifts God has given to all, without measure and directly. To pray at Christ's tomb we have to make a long trip and costly pilgrimage; we have only to go round the corner to receive Christ alive and as He is. The Eucharist awaits us at almost every crossroad. Certainly it is dangerous for man to have such gifts always too close at hand. That's just too bad. The Church will always refuse to run God's munificence

*This is the conclusion of the article published under the same title in the issue of April 28.

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through a meter, even if that might lead us to know what it is worth and save us from becoming what is most horrible in all the world, people who are bored with God.

★

We dote on the esoteric; we would like truths reserved for an élite; we would like to belong to an inner circle. We are prone to believe that the major truths and mysteries should be veiled from the gaze of the curious. But the Christian knows that God's mysteries can be seen from the sidewalk in the shop window; the inner life of God, Christ's Passion through love, are on sale for a nickel in all the catechisms, are given free and gratis to all comers. God's hiding place is in a Splendor of Glory.

We know what prodigies of intellectual ingenuity, what perspicaciousness, what a laborious training of the mind are needed in order to uncover the smallest of scientific, historical or philosophical truths. Through revelation the old woman who peddles flowers on the street corner knows more about the mysteries of life and death, about this world and about the world beyond this world, than do the deepest metaphysicians—and her knowledge is effortless, almost without her having sought it. Our pride, our vanity, the snobbishness that we have as intellectuals, and also a certain minute and extremely material feeling that we have for what is just, reject this facility. We say there is not enough of the hunt and the game is too easy, too abundant. Man, who is like a dog trained to stand on its hind legs to beg a tidbit, turns aways disdainfully when all is given him simply and without fuss. If only, then, we had to have incantations! That is why we are attracted by the charlatans and the men of science. There is indeed something very true in both these attitudes, in this feeling of ours that the conquest of truth should be difficult. But what we do not realize is that to accept the free gift is the hardest thing for man to do. It is easy for man to prefer the hunt to the game the hunt provides, because it is easy for man to prefer himself, and a love for the truth which one cannot master must be a very great and a very pure love.

Meanwhile, other Christians, the slothful ones, who do not understand what this stripping of self means, easily fall into a contempt for the precarious and fugitive little truths which have cost such exertion to attain. And so, with a few exceptions, our humanity can be divided into three groups: those who are smug, those who pursue the magic and the esoteric, and those who seek always and never find, since in their search they love themselves, while in discovery they would be forced to love Another.

★

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ness can be expressed was expressed in the life and words of Christ. But all which we were granted could not be expressed; the best could not filter through the Sacred Humanity. Yet it appeared—*apparuit benignitas*. One would wish to stop, to contemplate, to enjoy Christ; He forbids us to stop: "You will enter, and you will go out, and you will find green pastures." An urgent, human anxiety is easy when one stands deprived of everything; it becomes difficult when one is faced with so great an abundance. "Bonum nobis hic esse." A divine anxiety must follow the path cut open by a human anxiety. And what also makes a great difficulty is that one must always go forward into Christ and not elsewhere; it is not a question of learning something new but of unlearning what one has learned, and of learning all over again, from the beginning, the same thing. And this unlearning and this learning again is not an act but a passion. Woe to the Christian who is happy to live in faith and who is not driven by faith, harassed by faith, unendingly toward the Light of Glory—for that Light alone will pulverize human words and thoughts. It is the Light of Glory which alone is knowledge proportioned to God. Dogma tortures us, for it gives us all of God and hides God from us. If we are satisfied with this state of affairs we are traitors, and if we evade the trial soon we have nothing left but a philosophy and a theodicy which we decorate with the fine name of a religion in spirit and truth.

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It is not easy to live, to love, to act in the invisible, the impalpable, and in silence. This Invisible, this Impalpable, this Silent One is not only the origin and the end of our acts, our gifts, our conversations and our love; He prolongs our acts and gives them motion. Yet animated by this Silent One we see ourselves as ridiculous dancers whom no heard music—not even an inner music—explains.

For years the young man who has left his father and his mother, who has renounced the young girl who could have become his spouse and companion, who has turned away from all the careers which make you sweat and breathe hard and feel strong and efficient, who has prepared in the enervating routine of the seminary, has been awaiting the fearful moment when he will go up to the altar. For one instant—yes, he knows that—for one brief instant, but every day, he will be the instrument animated by the All-Powerful. His lips will utter the very sound of the miraculous act of God. And then this instant comes. The full price has been exacted of him to pay for this instant; he has paid, he reaches the moment of Consecration. He is like the parachutist who has to jump; he would like to refuse, he would like to escape; he goes forward, he articulates the syllables, bending over the altar he says: "This is My Body." And then he stands there. He stands there unchanged. Naïvely he had believed that the words would sear his lips as with fire, he had believed that God's power would fill his humanity as a strong wind fills a sail. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing happens to him. It is as if he had said, it is morning, it is noon, it is night. It is as if he had looked at a clock.

Hour after hour in the confessional he pronounces the words of absolution; agonizedly he looks at his hand which is raised to make the sign of the Cross; he touches his hand; he would wish it to burn for the privilege of being the channel of forgiveness. Nothing. Nothing. It is not only that he advances into the invisible; he has become as if woven into the invisible and the insensible.

Who will describe the disappointment held secretly concealed, as if it were a shameful wound, in the hearts of the best of priests ever since the day of their first Mass? An entire existence, a visible and palpable sacrifice in order to pronounce a few words which cost nothing to pronounce. Ah, if only those miraculous words were to torture us physically or morally!

Doubtless we were warned. Doubtless Saint John of the Cross warned us more or less. But no doctrine can armor our hearts against this wound. For months, for years, the priest stumbles, trips and dances to this music which no one hears—not even he. Is there a difference between the priest and the lunatic? The lunatic acts, speaks, gesticulates like Napoleon. But he is not Napoleon. Dancing to this imperceptible music I am perhaps a lunatic; like the lunatic I go deeper and deeper into a fearful solitude, a solitude bound by no walls. But then, in order to reassure his tortured priest, God shows him very simply that he is not a lunatic. For the priest entering deeper into the Silent One, living faithful to the Silent One, is not—as is the lunatic—continuously more isolated and separated from men who smoke, chase girls, go to the movies. The deeper he advances, the more he is held to men; he becomes a friend, he understands other men; other men trust him. And then the long months close upon him just as when the sea, disturbed a moment by the moving ship, closes behind the ship and remains imperturbable.

No doubt the best of Christians, unwilling to admit it, live through this same disappointment at the moment of the Consecration; the most decisive instant in their existence comes and passes. Ding, ding, ding—that's all. Few dare to proceed deeper and deeper, to enter deeper and deeper into the Silent One; the others throw themselves as if famished into action—resounding action, appeasing action, calming action, intoxicating action, torturing action—anything rather than to enter and live in the climate of God's silence.

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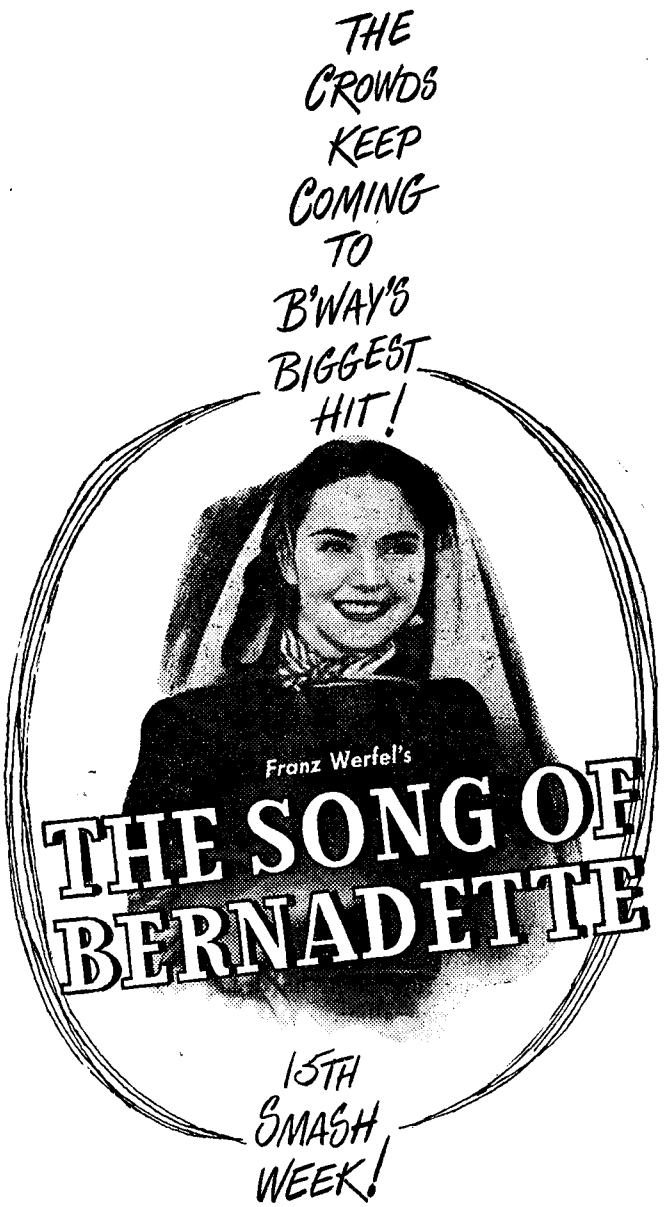
Certainly it is not difficult for man to make himself hard as stone, tranquil and sun-loving as a plant, violent and active as a beast, intelligent, active and sensitive as a man. He asks and claims human joys and despairs; he adapts himself to everything, to war, to concentration camps, to sickness; nothing disturbs him save—"Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect." And that—that is Christianity.

The Stage & Screen

Helen Goes to Troy

TO THE choicest Offenbach tunes—from here, there and everywhere—the New Opera Company reassembles Max Reinhardt's version of the Homeric legend and makes, I should say, a very neat job of it. As I am musically unlearned, I cannot be entirely specific concerning Eric Korngold's arrangement and carpentering of the score, but I love this *kind* of gay, nostalgic, dancy business and the whole curlicue—embracing waltzes and can-cans, a modern fox-trot, and even the by-heart *Barcarole*—appeared to me to be witty, even at times, indeed, lovely stuff.

It is not difficult here to trace the font of Gilbert and Sullivan and I must say I envied Herbert Baker his chance to lyric such engaging airs. When he got a chance to make the words *tell* beyond the music—a sort of metered spoken-choral effect notable in the "Apple Man" affair, and the "We must destroy the town of Troy" zigzag—I thought Mr. Baker's work daring and exactly right. Although perhaps here I am crediting him with feints actually written into the Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan book. The book itself takes us up and into Wooden Horse (rampant with polka dots) and ends right there, which I thought precipitate. But before this, there is every choice, from burlesque to ballet, with, of course, some excellent singing thrown in; and I think even the precisely diffident should be able to handle the loud bawdy tone of much of the proceedings. In the part of the High Priest of Jupiter, Ralph Dumke proves himself one of the few true "beamish boys"; a fine thing. When he is dispensing oracular magic, keeping the "thunder casual" for the innocents, he is round, hoarse, amiable, and winks a wicked eye; and I loved him. Mme. Jarmila Novotna's Helen was beautiful and vocally lovely, which would seem to be the point; and William Horne as Paris, although physically stiff, sang well. I suppose the only thing more difficult than playing Menelaus would be to have *been* the little king; but at the same time, I could not help feeling that Ernest Truex came out at the thin end of the material the other evening. Somehow or other, he is not enough of anything: sad, silly, stupid, cynical, and I regretted that he must play his one solo hampered by an American flag, an honored property of the Alvin theater, perhaps, although certainly not of Robert Edmond Jones's quite stunning set. Quibbles include Donald



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Buka's determinedly authentic attitudes as young Orestes; and Ladislas Czettel's costumes which struck me as a mixture of strident and faded colors and no single style. (*At the Alvin.*)

A Highland Fling

AN AFFAIR which should have developed into the froth of the cream of the cream of the crop, bogs down badly in its staging and I must call it poor producing on the part of George Abbott. Margaret Curtis's determination to write herself a part, therefore an entire play, seems to me a laudable one. She is a serious actress and might, I think, have filled the bill in the writing if only her work had fallen into more sensitive hands. As it is, the script is charming enough to have merited perfecting before it reached the playing point, and certainly more meticulous direction thereafter. Considerably over-crowded and somewhat under-motivated, the story depends upon the acceptance of two main premises: that in Scotland only children and "dafties" can consort with spirits; and that it is possible to become a sort of voluntary "daftie" in case one prefers the spirit world to the real one. Like all clumsy vehicles, it is not possible of brief outline. The former Laird of Cairn McGorum, an impenitent and most romantic ghost, has been haunting his former castle for the past five generations and is at present torn between the supplications of an angel (his erstwhile wife) who would have him join her in heaven, and his attraction to the "daftie" of his choice, a young and most wistful village girl.

Learning that his passage through the pearly gates depends merely upon his converting one single person to the straight and narrow path, he decides to try for it by reforming the rapscallion of the village, whereupon a mighty contest of wits ensues, concluding in wings and a halo for the Laird, while his "daftie" sorrowfully relinquishes him for the early attractions of his great great great great grandson, present tenant of the castle. All this is somehow or other bound up with the fate of the Scottish Scone Stone which is finally delivered to a traveling American from Pittsburgh in order to save it forever from the English. With such a podge of material and detailed idea, plus the necessary furbelow writing designed to set the local-color, the piece is really nothing more than the first scattered draft of a play, memorable for a number of enchanting small scenes, none of which is developed in the round.

Miss Curtis's last act is composed of two scenes where there should have been only one, and her blood-and-bone characters (I accept the vagaries of her angels and ghosts) too often lack adequate reason for entering and leaving the stage. I have a feeling that the main reason for the playwright's failure lies in her seeming reluctance to contrive an out-and-out love story—certainly an absorbing mode of entertainment and the ingredients for which she had well in hand. The very self-consciousness of the title leads one to expect a sort of *pastiche* which is considerably less than one receives. Somewhere long the line, Miss Curtis began shifting her point of emphasis, or it was shifted for her, and this always fatal move makes me wish she had begun re-writing her play the day after she finished it.

Then too, Mr. Abbott's well known method of rearing exaggerated laughs out of nothing cheapens the business, and in several instances, he has cast lamentably. Having watched him carefully in three jobs this season, it is my opinion that John Ireland is simply a poor actor and here in the skimpy part of the young Laird, he is entirely unable to hold his own. In the longish rôle of the Rake, Karl Swenson is energetic but not convincing, and I thought Frances Reid's Angel (the prize of the piece) unspecial and physically wrong. And her costumes were wrong. Particularly these three lacked the necessary discipline to hold to the Scottish burr—another unlucky arrangement. Ralph Forbes as the dour Ghost, Miss Curtis herself as Silly, and an amazing infant of perhaps nine years—Patti Brady—were delightful, their separate scenes being well worth the price of the evening. Miss Curtis (looking a little like a blonde Hepburn) gave what I should call an early Helen Hayes reading—gentleness combined with an airy wonderment. I thought John Root's architectural settings were effective but wrong; they crowded the stage and hindered Mr. Forbes's actions and stature. It seemed to me that the same impression could have been achieved by a little expert lighting—perhaps projections for the night scenes—thereby leaving enough floor-space for the playing. (*At the Plymouth.*)

KAPPO PHELAN.

England! My England!

IT IS difficult to discover just what the makers of *"The White Cliffs of Dover"* had in mind. If they thought they were helping Anglo-American good will, they shouldn't have gone so far out of their way to make both sides angry with caricature portraits. No doubt they felt that good natured kidding is good for everyone. And so it is. Especially when it's kept on the comedy level as in the scenes between the American heroine's father and the English colonel, who are still fighting the war of 1812 and arguing about a chess board taken by the English from the White House. But the satire gets out of hand when it becomes mixed up with the sentimental and serious parts of the film which exhibit the English upper classes as complacently involved in feudal codes and superior attitudes toward Americans whose stubborn Yankee spunk becomes more stubborn when rubbed the wrong way.

The film is based on "The White Cliffs" by Alice Duer Miller; and anyone who has read her popular poem knows pretty well what to expect. Using the poem as an outline, scriptwriters Claudine West, Jan Lustig and George Froeschel expanded its story by adding new characters and situations. Poet Robert Nathan was called in to add some verses to the long Miller opus which the heroine recites from time to time and which was evidently not long enough for this seemingly endless 126-minute movie. As it now stands, the plot is about a sentimental, idealistic American (beautifully portrayed by Irene Dunne) who is in love with England. On visiting that country with her father in 1913, Susan falls in love with a baronet, marries him in spite of being yankeely on the

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defensive against his tradition-steeped, condescending family, enjoys short but great happiness before he goes off to the war, and remains with her English in-laws. In 1916 she visits her husband in France for reasons made obvious by the family nurse whose arms long to hold an Ashwood heir. At first irreconcilably bitter when her husband is killed, Susan finally accepts the situation and devotes herself to being the mother of a baronet. We see the boy growing up in the English tradition: grand manners, *noblesse oblige,* and all. Susan makes no attempt to bring her son to America until the film unsubtly casts nazi shadows and coming trouble. But then it is too late. Her son, every inch a lord, asks: "Do you think father would like me to run away?" He stays to assume obligations and she stays with him.

Most of "The White Cliffs of Dover" is told as a flashback. We first see Susan, as a Red Cross Commandant in London in 1942, preparing her hospital for casualties. As she waits for them to be brought in, the camera goes back into the past to tell us the story of her love for England. Clarence Brown has directed the film well and Sidney Franklin has given it a beautiful and expensive production. But none of the characters in this soft, glowing schoolgirl romance come to life as real people. They are mainly types and symbols: our Anglophile heroine all aflutter over English literature and lore; her bluff father (Frank Morgan) griping over England's monetary system; her boyish boyfriend (Van Johnson) using American slang. And the English portraits are even more conventionally conventional: the baronet (Alan Marshal), handsome, a trifle on the dull side but with a slight sense of humor; his mother (Gladys Cooper), a lady to her fingertips, refusing to break down even for the news of death; the bossy, righteous Nanny (May Whitty); the son (Roddy McDonald) being very landed gentry as he rides over his estate. And this Devon estate itself, with its manor house, lawns and tenants and ancestors dating back to 1283, is right out of turn-of-the-century novels. Some of this traditional English atmosphere is kidded very gently; but the film is quite serious in its two scenes showing American troops parading in London in the two World Wars. Audiences who applaud Susan's saying to her son: "You're half Yankee and I won't let you forget it," are going to wonder at her exclaiming: "I want America to come into the war," (in 1916) and are going to wonder still more when she is accused of wanting to plunge all of the US into it to save one Englishman. However since Susan's English husband is portrayed so colorlessly, we are meant to accept him as one of the many symbols of England with which she is so reverently in love. When he is killed, her son continues this symbolism. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when the flashback is finished and the camera returns to the hospital, that Susan's son is brought in with the casualties. The film does succeed in spite of its confused satire and outmoded attitudes, in pointing up a moral: that the English and Americans cannot break faith with their dead again; they must build together for a permanent peace.

I don't think the makers of "The White Cliffs" went through all this fuss just to put that message across.

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Prompted by the tremendous box office success of "Mrs. Miniver," they are no doubt hopeful of a repeat business. The film will obviously make money. It is unfortunate that it could not also have done a job in helping English and American friendship. Members of our Armed Forces who go to the British Isles are shown "Welcome to Britain" (an indoctrination film made by the OWI and the British Ministry of Information), which portrays the English with friendly understanding. Civilian cinemagoers looking for this kind of good will might turn to "Tunisian Victory" and "The Memphis Belle." "White Cliffs" is likely to have the opposite results.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

Books of the Week

McCarthy of Wisconsin. Edward A. Fitzpatrick. Columbia. $3.50.

THERE WAS, for me, a nostalgic quality about this book. It reminded me of the days when I, and I thought the world, was young. For I belonged to a generation to which the name McCarthy meant something other than Eddie Bergen's boy friend. It stood for "the Wisconsin idea" and that idea was progressivism based on a realistic knowledge of facts. Close to its heart was Charles McCarthy whose particular service was the creation and maintenance of the Legislative Reference Library, the first of its kind in America where legislators could get help in studying problems before them and in drafting bills.

McCarthy was a son of Irish immigrants, born and reared in the shoe town of Brockton, Massachusetts. He was a self-made man in the best American tradition. The blurb on the jacket of this book under review sums up his life accurately and with restraint when it says "Charles McCarthy became in turn a football hero [at Brown University], a coach, a Ph.D., the creator of the Legislative Reference Library and a powerful and picturesque influence in Wisconsin politics during the régime of the older LaFollette. He helped both Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson draw up their platforms when they ran against each other for the Presidency, was active in agricultural organizations, investigated industrial relations and played an important rôle in building up the reputation of the University of Wisconsin, in developing its Extension division and in establishing 'continuation' schools throughout the state."

The story of this career is admirably told by Colonel Fitzpatrick, President of Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, who in his younger days was associated with Mr. McCarthy. In telling the story the author recreates the times in which it was lived. He himself says that his life of McCarthy "is called a social biography because it is concerned less with the re-creation of an individual as he lived among men and more with the social influence of his ideas and his actions." I am inclined to think that the book would have been better had it given us more of the personal life of the man. That he was a warm-hearted, imaginative American of Irish stock, and a great public servant, is apparent in this account of his public activities, but one would have liked to know more about him as a man, not entirely concerned with documents and causes.

For me the biography raised an interesting question which is highly pertinent in these days of Hatch Act restrictions on civil service employees. McCarthy's Legislative Reference Library was non-partisan, supposedly at the service of legislators of every shade of opinion. McCarthy was anything himself but non-partisan except that usually he was not personally active in party politics. Even this rule he broke when his admiration of Wilson led him, unsuccessfully, to seek the Democratic nomination for the United States Senate during the war years. This was one of his two activities which his admiring biographer discusses under the general heading: "Two Extraneous Episodes."

It was natural that a man of such strong views concerning proper social legislation should come in for the kind of attacks which the author describes as "a political blitzkrieg against McCarthy." I, like the author, am on the side of the angels (that is of McCarthy and progressivism), so I rejoiced in his victory over the Forces of Evil. All the same if I were a progressive executive or legislator and had to deal with a conservative head of the official Legislative Reference Library who was as active and able in advancing his views as was McCarthy, I think I should espouse a view of the duties of civil servants quite different from that which, fortunately for Wisconsin and America, Charles McCarthy took. And there lies a real problem for us to face.

One is tempted to go on and discuss the adequacies and inadequacies of the McCarthy type of progressivism. It certainly belongs to an age which with reason was far more optimistic than ours can be. Nevertheless, democracy is the stronger in America because of the kind of work done by McCarthy and the LaFollette group—to which McCarthy himself scarcely belonged—in the years before the First World War.

NORMAN THOMAS.

Perelandra. C. S. Lewis. Macmillan. $2.00.

THE TREMENDOUS range which Mr. Lewis covers in this independent sequel to "Out of the Silent Planet" is evident in the fact that the book can be ranked high in the fields of creative imagination, speculative theology and engrossing adventure. In the first, the author is superb from many standpoints, writing whole passages of prose poetry that inevitably suggests the sweep of Dante and of Milton. As adventure, too, "Perelandra" is as tense and thrilling as "Assignment in Brittany" or any of that ilk. When it comes to speculative theology, however, the book is less successful although even here intensely provocative.

"Perelandra" in the language of "Old Solar," which Mr. Lewis invented in his previous book, is the planet Venus, here imaginatively created as one of great seas with many shallow floating islands. On these live the planet's first man and woman, the counterparts of Earth's Adam and Eve, newly created in the earth's present day. Angels transport miraculously the Englishman, Ransom, to one of these islands where he meets the woman and learns from her that she and her mate live in precisely the same terms as Eden. Instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they are forbidden to live on the Fixed Land. But Satan, too, instead of a serpent, uses another Englishman, Weston, to further his temptation and after Ransom neatly kills Weston, Satan continues to inhabit and activate his body. It is in the continuousness of the struggle between Ransom and this demonized body that the book's adventure lies.

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Mr. Lewis, as might be inferred, works out the Perelandra drama in terms of his Eve's resistance to the temptations. These are presented in very clever terms, as are all the details of the complete innocence which governs the planet's entire creation. Whereas this reviewer may not be correct in considering *"felix culpa"* more poetically than theologically true, he is at least convinced that Mr. Lewis loads the dice rather heavily for his own Eve. Quite obviously, left alone, she would not have overcome Satan. She has weakened to a disastrous extent when Ransom, like any well-behaved *deus ex machina,* rescues her by his attack on the physical body of the enemy and his final destruction of that body by hurling it into the molten lava deep in the planet. This act leads inevitably, if logically, to another weakness of the plot—Ransom, in their final triumph, is hailed by the Adam and Eve as the "savior" of Perelandra.

This triumph, with the archangels officiating in bestowing full possession and dominion, is among the most powerful sections of the book. Aside from the flaw previously mentioned, it is writing of the highest order. Definitely in the Wellsian vein, "Perelandra" is, from all standpoints, far superior to other tales of interplanetary adventures. JOHN GILLAND BRUNINI.

High Noon. C. P. Lee. Macmillan. $2.50.

The Devil and the Deep. C. M. Dixon. Scribners. $2.75.

MR. LEE, author of the new novel, "High Noon," is, according to the jacket, a nice-looking young man who grew up in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, went to Washington and Lee University, Oxford (as a Rhodes Scholar) and is now an instructor at Harvard. He writes very well, with style, humor and perception, and it would be nice to say that this is a fine novel, but there are unfortunately several reasons why that can't be done. The only point, however, in going into them is that one does get the feeling that Mr. Lee has it in him to write such a novel some one of these days. Therefore, we proceed.

"High Noon" is obviously an autobiographical account of Mr. Lee's growth to self-conscious manhood in the city of Pine Bluff. There is no plot, but the pursuit of one year after another, of one commonplace incident after another in the commonplace lives of the hero, his mother and his brother. It appears that Mr. Lee was fixing to illustrate, if he could, that old French definition of art: *faire quelque chose de rien.* Unfortunately his literary gifts were slightly bested by the quantity of *rien* in his material. Next time, Mr. Lee, just a pinch of plot if you please.

The theme of the book is a perennially interesting one: the struggle of the sensitive young intellectual to escape from his drab, insensitive environment. But the conflict isn't that simple, for the hero comes to realize more and more that even Pine Bluff, Arkansas, can be an attractive, interesting place if you dig a little beneath the surface. There was a song once, "It Ain't What You Do, It's the Way That You Do It," and somewhere we seem to have heard sentiments expressed to the effect that "it ain't where you are, it's what you are."

But the exasperating thing about "High Noon" is that the question is never quite resolved and even at the end neither you nor Mr. Lee seem quite sure whether it is a fate worse or better than death to live out one's days in a place like Pine Bluff, which probably is typical of most of us. With our minds we accept the hypothesis that

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it doesn't matter where you live, but meanwhile every fiber of our being protests that outside New York City (or Paris, or Square Corners, Ohio) there is positively no salvation.

I want to encourage Mr. Lee, but not to the extent of urging you to buy his book. If you see it lying around, read it. The next one you might want to buy.

★

MISS DIXON'S novel, "The Devil and the Deep," is all about the American merchant seamen, and certainly she could not have found a more deserving group of men to publicize. Not so long ago the percentage of seamen lost was four, or one out of every 25, as compared with an Army-Navy total of a fraction of one percent. The servicemen were plied with free food, free fun and free kisses from film stars. The sailors were left outside in the cold looking in. Such is the power of a uniform.

Things are better now for the seamen, but probably they are still not as good as they should be for men who are just about 100 percent front-line troops, if you define the front line as anything within range of enemy guns, bombs and torpedoes. Miss Dixon is best in her reporting of such hair-curling dangers as the run to Murmansk in mid-winter, the ships draped in ice, nazi planes and submarines banging away almost constantly from sky above and sea below, and always the cold, cold water waiting for the shivering soul.

The fact is that Miss Dixon is a reporter and not a novelist. For "The Devil and the Deep" is not a novel, but an endless series of interviews that Miss Dixon had with seamen who happened to wander into a bar on West Street near NMU headquarters, which in the book is called Krist's Place and in real life is called, for all we know, Krist's Place. It is really amazing, in fact, the way American reporters work on the assumption that every routine job they do is just perfect material for a novel.

When she is reporting seamen's talk more or less straight and describing seamen in a West Street bar, Miss Dixon is on fine, solid ground. But when she is putting her own self-conscious talk into seamen's mouths or building up two hammy characters who like to call each other by their full names ("Benny Lynn, you are a handsome man" or "God love you, Milly Molly Southerland"), then Miss Dixon is on nothing but the sheerest, most treacherous quicksand. It is too bad that the American merchant seamen couldn't rate a better book.

JOHN C. CORT.

A Well Full of Leaves. Elizabeth Myers. Morrow. $2.50.

MRS. MYERS'S short novel comes to America with the recommendations of more than a half dozen British critics. I must confess that I can't imagine why. She tries to tell the story of four children born to an almost destitute couple. The kids start right off, with ages ranging between 11 and 15, talking as though they had completed the requirements for degrees with honors at Cambridge or Oxford, and their thinking is a fair imitation of what a slightly muddled university man might produce. The only thing to be said in favor of "A Well Full of Leaves" is that its author really does know how to use the English language freshly—though occasionally it is a trifle too fresh, and could do with a bit of aging. H. L. B.

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The Inner Forum

Early Editions of the Bible

THE CAPUCHIN, Father John M. Lenhart, presents in the current issue of the *American Ecclesiastical Review* (Catholic University of America) an interesting summary of the knowledge we now have on early editions of the Bible. The very first Bibles were transcribed by hand in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin, the languages in which the Gospel message was first preached. Other languages in which it is known for certain that the Bible was translated in the early centuries of the Church include Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Gothic, Ethiopic, Persian, Old-Slavonic, Sogdian and Syrian. "During the Middle Ages the Bible was translated into the Italian, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, Romaunt, Danish, Swedish, Anglo-Saxon, English, Irish, Welsh, and Breton languages." In the fourteenth century, parts of the Bible were also translated into Tatar and Turkish.

Before printing was in vogue, the copying of the Bible was a stupendous task. It is said that in the fifteenth century Thomas à Kempis spent thirteen years copying a Latin Bible in five folio volumes. The simplest and most rapid copyist, it is estimated, would require (for copying the Bible in English) 1,575 hours. Obviously only an infinitesimal proportion of the manuscripts of the Bible are still preserved. The 3,400 extant Hebrew manuscripts, a number of them incomplete, "do not contain more than 39 out of the 46 books of the Old Testament." Greek compilations containing the whole or parts of the Bible now total about 4,000, while Latin Bible manuscripts number about 8,000. Pre-Reformation Bible manuscripts in Oriental and European languages amount to something less than 1,000.

From 1450 to 1520, one hundred and ninety-five complete editions (132,600 copies) of the Bible are known to have been printed in Czech, French, German, Greek, Italian, Latin and Spanish. "The demand of the people and the clergy was not so much for the possession of complete Bibles as for parts of the Bible to serve as prayer manuals and meditation books, or as textbooks for catechetical instruction in schools. To meet this excessive demand the printers set up in movable type and put to press as many as 4,938 editions of such parts with an aggregate of more than 3,637,000 copies. All these parts of the Bible were printed prior to the year 1521." Favorite parts of the Bible which ran into many editions in the early days of printing were the Psalter or Book of Psalms, the Postil (Sunday and Feast Day Epistles and Gospels) and the Book of Hours (the Day Hours of the Divine Office). "All these Bibles and parts of Bibles were printed by Catholic printers."

James RORTY is a journalist and student of cultural and social problems who has devoted his loving care to the advertising business ("Our Master's Voice") and organized medicine ("American Medicine Mobilizes"). He is at present writing a book on the nutritional deficiencies which threaten our civilization.
Rev. Jean C. de MENASCE is stationed in Washington, D. C.
Norman THOMAS, former Socialist candidate for the Presidency, has long been a close student of Wisconsin politics.
John Gilland BRUNINI is Executive Director of the Catholic Poetry Society of America.

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